

The Promise to You and

A SERMON

PREACHED IN

GRACE CHURCH, S

AFTER HAVING BAPTIZED THE INFAN

THE REV. JUNIUS M

ON THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY

OCTOBER 11, 184

BY THE REV. SAMUEL FARMAN

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF

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You and your Children.

SERMON

PREACHED IN

CHURCH, SAYBROOK,

THE INFANT SON OF THE RECTOR,

JUNIUS M. WILLEY,

ON SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,

SEPTEMBER 11, 1846, P. M.

FARMAR JARVIS, D. D., LL. D.

AT THE REQUEST OF THE VESTRY.

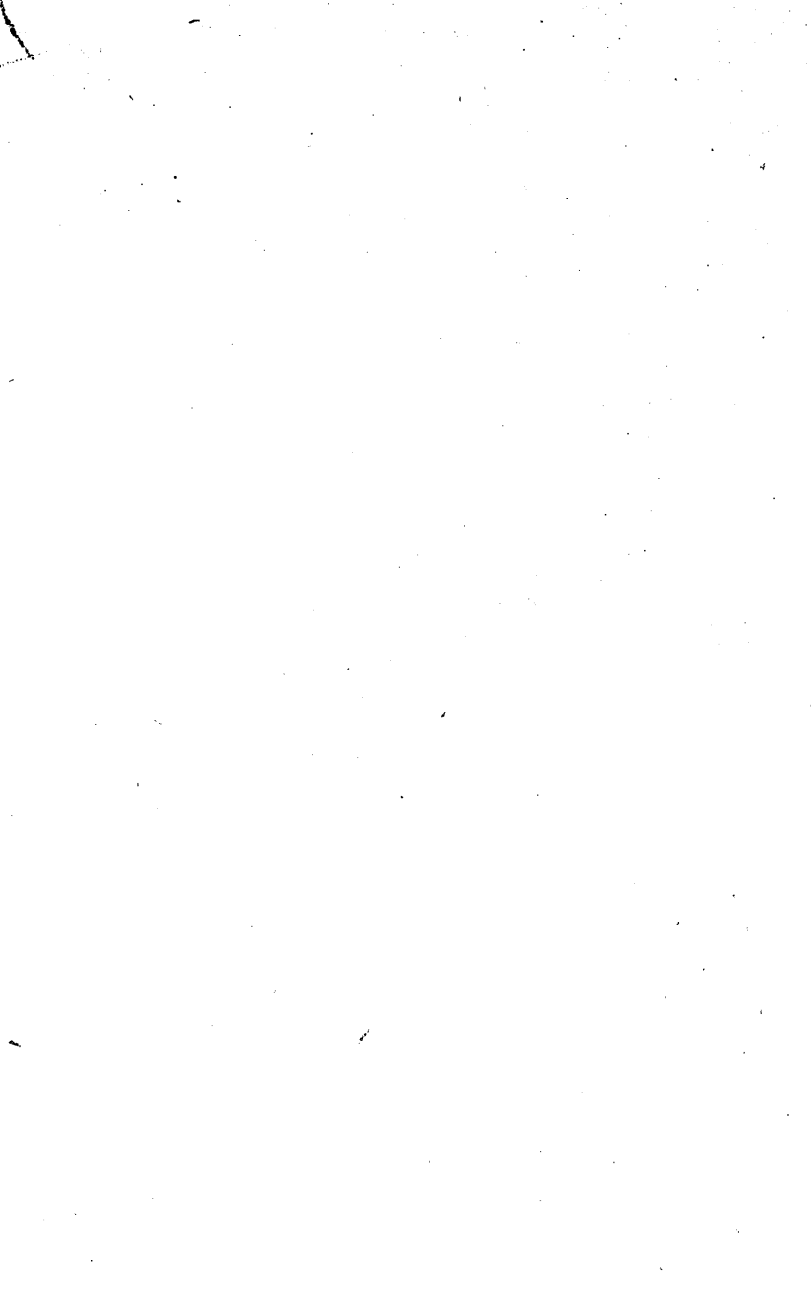
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REVEREND S. FARMAR JARVIS, D. D.

DEAR SIR,—The undersigned having listened to your valuable sermon delivered in Grace Church yesterday afternoon, and believing the argument for the validity of infant baptism rightly administered to be unanswerable, beg leave respectfully to solicit a copy of the sermon for publication, that we may preserve it for future reference, and that others beside ourselves may be benefited by so excellent a discourse.

Most respectfully yours,

DAVID SPENCER,	}	<i>Wardens and Vestrymen of Grace Church.</i>
JOHN S. DICKINSON,		
RICHARD CHALKER,		
ERASTUS HASKELL,		
LORENZO REDFIELD,		
HENRY C. WALKER,		

To the above request of the Wardens and Vestrymen, permit me to add my sincere desire that you will not withhold from us and from others your sermon upon a subject so little understood and so little appreciated as that of infant baptism.

With the highest respect and esteem,

Yours truly,

J. M. WILLEY, *Rector.*

SAYBROOK, Oct. 12, 1846.

SERMON.

Acts II. 39.

For the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

THE text forms a part of St. Peter's address to the penitent Jews on the day of Pentecost; and I have chosen it, beloved brethren, on the present occasion, because, when rightly understood, it will remove the doubts which have been raised concerning the validity of infant baptism.

Our Lord had promised to St. Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven¹; which meant, according to the earliest Latin father, that he should have the personal honour of first opening the door of the Church by baptism.² The Apostles had been directed to "tarry in the city of Jerusalem until" they should "be endued with power from on high."³ The Holy Ghost descended therefore on the day of Pentecost; and under His influence, and by His authority St. Peter spake. My brethren, they are not the words of man, but the words of God; and therefore let us hear them with reverence and godly fear. "Repent and be baptized every one of

¹St. Matt. xvi. 19. ²Tertul. de Pudicitia Ed. Rigaltii, 1641. p. 743.
³St. Luke, xxiv. 49.

you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. *For the PROMISE is unto YOU and to YOUR CHILDREN.*”

What promise? That conveyed in the very terms; the remission of sins after true repentance, and the gift of the Holy Ghost; and this promise was to their children as well as to themselves. By what right, then, can children be excluded? If it be said that children are incapable of actual sin, while they are infants, and therefore cannot repent, and consequently do not come within the terms of the promise, it is answered that while the fact is admitted the consequence is denied. Children suffer death, which is the punishment of sin, though they themselves have not sinned. In their natural state they are subject to the penalty of Adam's guilt. May they not have the remission of that guilt in baptism? May not their death be turned into a blessing by being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ?

But the objection arises from too limited a view of the promise. If children live, they will commit actual sin; and the benefit of baptism extends forgiveness or remission of sin to *the future* as well as to *the past*. It conveys the general assurance of pardon to the contrite and penitent sinner. It engages that he shall not, like Adam, incur the forfeiture of blessings for one, or even for many sins; but that, during his whole mortal life, he may repent and turn to God. Why may not the infant receive this assurance *before* he has sinned as well as *after*?

But the promise includes another blessing—the gift of the Holy Ghost; and surely the absence of actual

sin, renders the infant soul more meet to receive the Spirit's hallowing influences. All that is good in man proceeds from the Holy Spirit. How important is it that He should operate upon the heart before it sins! With what anxiety then, should we not seek for our children that promise which the Holy Spirit offers in baptism, to take them under His own care and bestow upon them His manifold gifts? No Christian can rightly understand the nature of baptism, without perceiving that it is a most solemn and awful contract between God and man; a contract conveying inestimable blessings, and demanding most sacred duties; a contract in which God the Holy Ghost is present and acting, through the ministry which He himself has appointed; a contract in which the meritorious death and resurrection of Christ are applied to the body and soul of the recipient. To prove this the more effectually, I proceed to show—

That Baptism was introduced as a covenant sign under Moses;

That it had then the same signification as now;

That it was then applied to children; and

That our Lord made no alteration excepting such as proceeded necessarily from his superiority to Moses both as a Divine Lawgiver, and as the great and only Mediator of the gospel covenant.

I. St. Paul expressly calls the covenant made with Abraham, the Gospel¹; and the sign and seal of that covenant was circumcision.² But when Esau was rejected on account of his profanity, the children of Israel

¹Gal. iii. 8. 15–17. ²Gen. xvii. 10; Rom. iv. 11.

required a new sign to distinguish them from the other descendants of Isaac. On their departure, therefore, from Egypt we hear for the first time of baptism.¹ The gospel covenant was renewed and confined to them at Sinai, and the terms of the Covenant were as follows: "If ye will obey my voice indeed and keep my Covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation."²—These terms they accepted, answering together and saying, "all that the Lord hath spoken we will do." The obligations of the Covenant being thus solemnly and audibly accepted, God commanded Moses to "Go unto the people and sanctify them to-day and to-morrow, and let them wash their clothes, and be ready against the third day: for the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai."³ By this sanctification of them, and the washing of their clothes, the Jewish commentators universally understand baptism.⁴ "By three things," says Maimonides, "did Israel enter into Covenant; by circumcision and baptism and sacrifice." And it is very remarkable that the law was given by God to Moses on the day of Pentecost; the very same day on which the Holy Ghost descended, and the door of the Church was opened by St. Peter with holy baptism.

That this interpretation of the Jewish expositors of

¹With regard to proselytes, Lightfoot says that the Jews date the act of baptism from the patriarch Jacob himself. Gen. xxxv. 2. Heb. and Talm. Exercit. Works, Vol. 2. p. 117.

²Exod. xix. 5, 6. ³Exod. xix. 10, 11. ⁴See Lightfoot Heb. and Talm. Exercit. on St. Matt. iii. 6; Works, vol. ii. p. 116, &c.

the Law must be correct, may be argued from its universality and from incidental expressions in the New Testament—First from its universality; for the Jews would never have received such an exposition from Christian commentators; nor would they have agreed so perfectly if it had not been so understood from the beginning. Secondly from the language of the New Testament; for its incidental testimony to the belief of the nation is of the strongest character. It is evident that the Jews did not regard baptism as a novelty. There was no surprise expressed when St. John the Baptist began his baptism in Jordan. On the contrary, it was considered as presumptive evidence that he was the prophet Elijah, or the prophet like unto Moses, whose coming Moses had foretold, or the Christ whom they were expecting;¹ and the very idea that a new dispensation was to have baptism for its sign, indicates their knowledge that baptism was administered as a preparation for the giving of the Law.

II. That it had then the same signification as now, appears from the whole nature of the ceremonial Law. Washing with water was invariably used in connexion with the sin and trespass offerings in all cases of legal pollution. Both were intended to denote that the meritorious blood-shedding of Jesus Christ, and that alone, can purify the sinner. And hence in the New Testament occur such expressions as these, “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God.”²

¹St. John i. 19—25. Lightfoot in loco. Works, vol. i. p. 526—527.
²Rev. i. 5. See also 1 Peter ii. 9.

“These are they which—*have washed their robes*, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”¹ Both are allusions to the Covenant at Mount Sinai, when the Israelites became a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, and when they were sanctified and washed their clothes. The application of similar language to the Christian Church shows that the covenant, and baptism the sign and seal of the covenant, were in both cases one and the same.

III. That baptism was applied to children, appears from the practice of the Church of Israel in the admission of proselytes. “One ordinance,” said God to Moses, “shall be, both for you of the congregation, and also for the stranger that sojourneth with you, an ordinance forever in your generations: as ye are so shall the stranger be before the Lord.”² As therefore the nation of Israel were all washed or baptized with water, to prepare them for the reception of the law, so the stranger sojourning with them was to be subject to the same ordinance. “When a Gentile,” says Maimonides, “is willing to enter into the covenant, and gather himself under the wings of the majesty of God, and take upon him the yoke of the law, he must be circumcised, and baptized, and bring a sacrifice; and if it be a female, be baptized, and bring a sacrifice. As it is written, As you are so shall the stranger be. How are you? By circumcision, and baptism, and bringing of a sacrifice. So likewise a stranger (or proselyte) through all generations; by circumcision, and baptism, and bringing of a

¹Rev. vii. 14. ²Numb. xv. 15.

sacrifice.” To the children of such proselytes, baptism was also administered. “If a little proselyte be deprived of his father—and his mother brings him to be made a proselyte, they baptize him according to the judgement of the Sanhedrin, that is, that three men be present at the baptism who are now instead of a father to him.” You perceive from this quotation, that the practice of having godfathers who stand as sponsors or securities for the children, is derived, like the institution of baptism itself, from the Jewish Church. “If with a proselyte his sons and his daughters are made proselytes also, that which is done by their father redounds to their good. R. Joseph saith, When they grow into years they may retract;” where the comment adds, “This is to be understood of little children, who are made proselytes together with their father.”¹

IV. Such being the practice of the Jewish Church, if our Lord had intended to depart from it, He would have expressly established a different rule.² Moses, just before his death, predicted the coming of Christ, as the great Prophet like unto himself, by whom God would speak to them, and whom they must therefore obey.³ Moses and Christ are the only two lawgivers divinely appointed; Moses as a servant preparing for his Lord’s coming, Christ as a son over his own house.⁴ Under the Law, Baptisms and Offerings for sin were frequent; but when Christ came, to make a full and perfect satisfaction for sin by the one oblation of himself once offered, all the bloody rites and sacrifices of the Law were forever

¹Lightfoot ut sup. p. 118 and vol. 1. 526–527. ²Lightfoot ut sup. p. 119. ³Deut. xviii. 18. ⁴Heb. iii. 5, 6.

abolished. In like manner the various baptisms under the law were concentrated, after the coming of Christ, into *one*; and as there was but *one oblation* of Himself once offered, so was there to be in future but *one baptism*. To reiterate baptism would be the acknowledgment of an imperfect Atonement, a dreadful act of sacrilege, crucifying the Lord of life afresh, and putting him to open shame.¹ This one baptism Christ commanded His apostles to administer among all nations; and here was the great change which His coming occasioned. The Baptisms under the Law were confined to that one nation; the Baptism which began on the day of Pentecost was to be extended to all. No limitation of age was introduced, and consequently none was intended. Repentance for sins past,—Baptism received by every one in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,—the gift of the Holy Ghost, enabling all to keep God's commandments and thus avoid sins,—and the express declaration that this promise includes children as well as adults, to the remotest generations, and wherever the Christian Ministry should be sent,—such were the terms of salvation set forth on the day of Pentecost, as THE GREAT CHARTER OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, found it difficult to speak to them of the priesthood of Christ because they were “dull of hearing;” and he reproved them, that “when for the time, they ought to be teachers, they had need that one should teach them again which be

the first principles of the oracles of God.”¹ “Therefore,” he added, “leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection ; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.”² These fundamentals were as much believed and practised, before the coming of Christ as they are now ; and it is very observable that St. Paul here speaks of the doctrine of baptisms in the plural number, to show that the practice under the law must be taken into account in considering the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

My Brethren, after the lapse of eighteen centuries, men are still “dull of hearing,” and need to be taught the first principles of the oracles of God. We are still obliged to lay again the foundation of repentance, and faith, the doctrine of baptisms and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. Look around you among the varying sects by which the profession of Christ is deformed, and tell me whether you do not find that every one of these fundamentals, is by some persons and in some measure, denied or explained away ? We have still the same difficulty which St. Paul had, in teaching the adorable mysteries of our faith, and the nature and necessity of the Christian priesthood. The difficulty proceeds now, as it did then, principally from an evil heart of unbelief, which rejects the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, resists the

¹Heb. v. 11-14. ²Heb. vi. 1, 2.

authority of God's word, and makes the individual reasonings of our corrupted nature the sole and irresponsible arbiters of Truth. The history of the nation of Israel is placed upon a level with the records of heathen nations. All idea that *they* were under the Gospel as well as *we*, seems to be lost. And thus it is, that we must be perpetually busy about foundations, instead of rearing that beautiful superstructure which God in mercy has designed for man.

As the Apostle exhorted the Hebrews,¹ so let me exhort you, beloved Brethren, to go beyond that period of infancy which is "unskilful in the word of righteousness,"² and endeavour to obtain that "perfection" which he has elsewhere called "the stature of the fulness of Christ." Let us not, like children, "be tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine," but "speaking the truth in love let us grow up into him in all things which is the head, even Christ."³

From the beginning there has been but one plan of salvation for fallen man. The Gospel was proclaimed to Adam, and included all his posterity, until they by their wickedness, brought upon themselves an utter excision. The Gospel was again proclaimed to Noah, and included all his posterity until the earth was again filled with wickedness, and God was pleased to confine His mercies to a new race, supernaturally created from the loins of Abraham. It was now necessary to distinguish by an external sign, even by infant circumcision, the members of the Gospel covenant. But a part of

¹Heb. vi. 1. ²Heb. v. 13. ³Ephes. iv. 13, 14, 15.

these fell away from the faith, and the promises being limited to the children of Israel, *the new sign of baptism was introduced*. The first Passover was instituted to represent Christ, the true Lamb of God. The whole congregation, men, women and children, were baptized into Moses as their divinely appointed head and law-giver, in the cloud and in the sea.¹ They advanced to Sinai, and arrived there three days before the day of Pentecost. The terms of the Gospel covenant were proclaimed to them, as they are now proclaimed whenever baptism is administered; and they, by an audible response, the men and women for themselves, and the parents and other sponsors for their children, promised to do all that the Lord required. No sooner was this done, than all the assembled tribes, men, women and children, were baptized. The Law was given on the day of Pentecost: and soon after a solemn covenant sacrifice was offered to denote their reliance on the blood of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost. The priesthood of Aaron and his sons, with the Levites for their ministers, was now instituted. Oft repeated baptisms and sacrifices were continued day by day, even until the coming of Christ, who, uniting in himself all the offices of prophet, priest, and king, was to fulfil the Mosaic Law, and introduce a more perfect dispensation. As our great High Priest, He now offered up his own body and blood, and the one oblation, to which all antecedent sacrifices had pointed, caused every bloody rite to disappear forever. Among

¹ 1 Cor. x. 1, 2.

these was the right of infant circumcision, for which infant baptism was substituted; and hence St. Paul calls baptism the circumcision *made without hands*, or in other words, the spiritual or Christian circumcision.¹ This change required a change of priesthood; and the sacraments of the new law, the Eucharist as the perpetual Pass-over or great Peace-offering, and the ONE BAPTISM as connected with the ONE OBLATION or great Sin-offering, were entrusted to his Apostles, to be continued with their office, till He should come again to judge the quick and the dead.² The Gospel covenant was now, according to its original design, (a design which nothing but the wickedness of men had hitherto frustrated,) to be extended so as to embrace all the nations of the world. The Holy Ghost, the Third Person of the blessed Trinity, descended to abide with the Church, as soon as the Second Person had been glorified. He descended on the self-same day in which the Law had been given to Israel. Thus the *enlargement* of the Gospel covenant corresponded with its *contraction*. The day of Pentecost was the birth day of the Catholic Church. St. Peter having been the first to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ the Son of the living God, had the privilege of first opening its door. It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to the

¹Col. ii. 11, 12.

²Our Saviour in establishing his Church introduced no novelties. The Lord's prayer was an abridgement from forms then in use. Bread and wine were already oblations with the peace offerings. The *bloody* sacrifice was abolished; the bread and wine, the *unbloody* sacrifice, retained. Infant circumcision for males, and infant baptism in the case of females and proselytes had been long used. The *bloody* rite was abolished; the *unbloody* retained.

ancient covenant people;¹ and they whom the compunctious visitings of conscience awakened to a sense of their guilt in having crucified the Lord of life, were told to receive the grace of God in baptism, as their fathers had formerly received it in the wilderness.—“For the promise was to them and their children, and to all that were afar off, even as many as the Lord their God should call.”

What trifling is it with sacred things to raise such questions as are now daily raised, whether infants should be baptized, and whether the whole body or only a part of it should be washed with water, and yet neglect the all important question, by whom baptism should be administered! There is not a single passage in the New Testament which allows laymen to baptize. If an express command for every thing be necessary, and no room left for argument from analogy, it will be hard to show that any one who does not derive his authority from an Apostle, has any right to administer baptism. The rigid interpretation of a true principle, that union with the mystical body of Christ is necessary to salvation, led to the admission of lay-baptism in the case of dying infants, when a Bishop, Presbyter, or Deacon was not at hand. But whatever may be thought of that necessity, the unauthorized intrusion of laymen, where there is no danger of death, is a fearful act of presumption.

We are so in dread of violating the great principle of ONE baptism as connected with the ONE atonement, that we shrink with awe from the idea of reitera-

¹Acts xiii. 46.

tion; and therefore when we are certified that baptism has been administered with water in the name of the Holy Trinity, even though it be by laymen, we like not to pronounce it invalid. This has led to the charge of inconsistency, as if we thereby allowed it as a right. But this is a false view of the subject. We do not allow the right; but we distinguish between the sin of the administrator, and the condition of the recipient. The censer is hallowed even when the incense is lighted and waved by unlawful hands. No person who has received lay-baptism should rest satisfied with it, unless it has been specially ratified by the laying on of Apostolic hands. Even Presbyters and Deacons do not baptize without the express injunction that the infant shall be brought to the Bishop to be confirmed by him, so soon as he shall learn what a Christian ought to know and believe for the saving of his soul.

What trifling, then, I repeat it, are all questions as to the propriety and validity of infant baptism, when no question is made whether Christ hath commissioned the administrator, or the Holy Ghost hath authorized the baptism. "Eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."¹ "Except a man," that is *any one* "be born of water and of the spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."² These are the express declarations of Holy Scripture. It is at our peril if we violate them. Christ hath appointed: "Go ye into all the world, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them." The Holy Ghost hath prom-

¹Rom. vi. 2, 3. ²St. John, iii. 5.

ised : “Be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive”—MY GIFTS. What madness is it to relinquish or to slight these promises ! Yet how little is baptism regarded ! How many persons pass their whole lives without receiving baptism ! How many neglect to bring their children for that same purpose ! Does not this proceed from a want of faith in the Divine promises ? Oh if we could but realize our dependence upon God ; if we could but see that the Holy Ghost is ever present with His Church ; if we could but convince ourselves that when this little one is folded in the arms of God’s minister he is folded in the arms of Divine mercy ; if we could but feel, that when baptized into the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, it is the admission of him into the Ark, that he may pass through the waves of this troublesome world, and come to the land of everlasting life ;—Oh ! if this were believed as it ought to be believed, would it be possible for any father or mother to delay the reception of so great a benefit ! Christian Brother ! your child is washed in the blood of the Lamb ! Christian brother ! your child is regenerated by the Holy Ghost ! If he dies before the commission of actual sin, it is certain by God’s word, that he is in a state of endless felicity : if he lives and falls into sin, (for who is there that liveth and sinneth not,) he has the *preventing* grace of God to reclaim him, and the comforting assurance that if he truly repent, his sins will be forgiven. Dearly beloved brethren, I entreat you to “suffer the little children to come unto Christ, and forbid them not ; for of such is the

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. Mark x. 14-16.

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. 1 Pet. i. 2.

ph. iv. 13. ⁵¹ 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.